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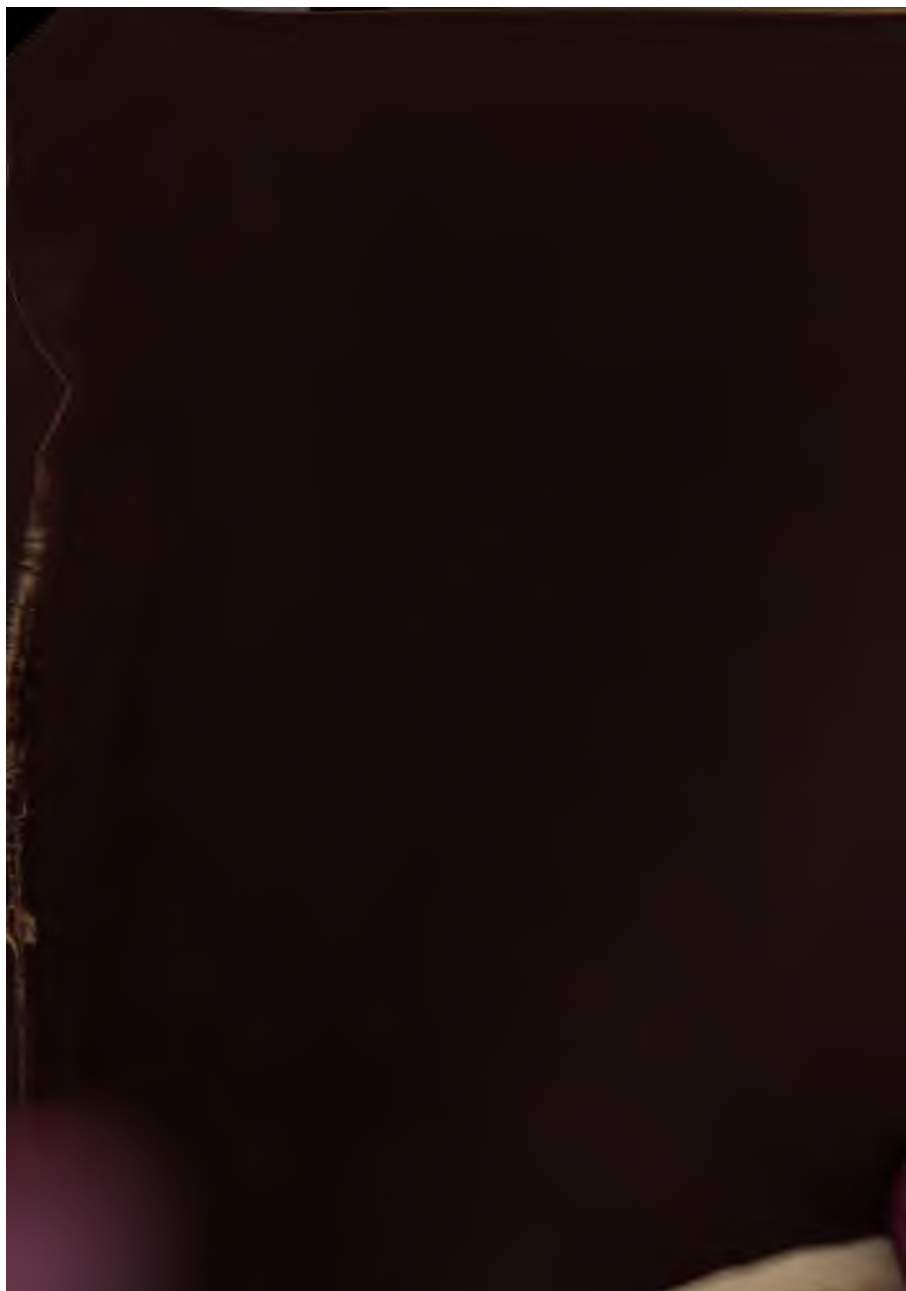
THE  
GREAT PASSION-PROPHECY  
VINDICATED.

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REV. BROWNLOW MAITLAND.M.A.



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THE  
GREAT PASSION-PROPHECY  
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BY THE

REV. BROWNLOW MAITLAND, M.A.

AUTHOR OF "THEISM OR AGNOSTICISM," "THE ARGUMENT  
FROM PROPHECY," &c.

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**PART I.**  
**THE METHOD.**





## THE GREAT PASSION-PROPHECY VINDICATED.

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### PART I. THE METHOD.

#### § 1. *The Christian Interpretation.*

**I**N the Catechetical Lectures of St. Cyril, who, in the middle of the fourth century of our era, became Bishop of the city in which our Lord was crucified, we find the following remark: "We preach Christ crucified, Who has already been preached aforetime by the Prophets." By these words the primitive bishop expresses a sentiment which was not peculiar to himself, or even to the Church of his time, but has been the universal sentiment of Christendom in all ages. And if at any period since the rise of Christianity the question had been asked of any believer, man, woman, or child, moderately acquainted with the

Holy Scriptures, "Where above all, most clearly and emphatically, is the prophetic preaching afore-time of Christ crucified to be found?" the reply with one consent would have pointed to the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. Within seven years of the founding of Christianity, it was from this Scripture that the Evangelist Philip preached Jesus to the perplexed Ethiopian enquirer<sup>1</sup>. It was in the same Scripture that the aged Apostle, St. Peter, found the most apt expressions to pourtray the guilelessness and innocence of the great Sufferer of Calvary, and His spotless self-oblation for human guilt<sup>2</sup>. It was the same Scripture which occurred to St. Matthew's recollection, when he recorded the healing of the sick by the Prophet of Nazareth<sup>3</sup>. It was to the same Scripture that both St. Paul and St. John referred, when they had occasion to complain of the slowness of their fellow-countrymen to believe in Jesus as their Messiah<sup>4</sup>. The note thus struck in the earliest days of Christianity has never ceased to be echoed in the hearts of believers, and in the faith of the Church. The wonderful chapter, with the music of its pathetic cadences

<sup>1</sup> Acts viii. 32, 33.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 24, 25.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. viii. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. x. 16; John xii. 38.

and penitent confessions, with its record of sorrow and its promise of deliverance, has stood in the place of a fifth narrative of the Redeemer's Passion. Read in the congregation, expounded from the pulpit, meditated upon in the closet, sung by devout choirs in solemn commemorative strains, it has quickened and guided the devotions of countless myriads of grateful worshippers, in their adoration of the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. Nor is it only within the Church which rejoices in His Cross, but even among those who still cleave to the Synagogue, that the sacred words have carried with them a prophetic adumbration of Him to Whom the Law and the Prophets bare witness. The ancient Rabbis of Israel, embarrassed though they were how to combine such a sorrowful strain with their jubilant Messianic hope, and in spite of their anxiety to tear away the witness of prophecy from the Christ of the Gospels, yet found themselves compelled to acknowledge a mysterious association between the prophet's suffering "Servant of Jehovah," and the king Messiah Who in the latter days should gather together the outcasts of Israel.

§ 2. *The rationalistic objection.*

But, like many other Christian beliefs, this interpretation of the great Passion-prophecy has not escaped challenge at the hands of a certain class of Biblical critics. Notwithstanding that it is so rooted in the faith of Christendom and in the hearts of individual believers, that to attack it is to inflict a cruel outrage on their most sacred convictions, these expositors with a light heart assail it in the name of scientific criticism. "Study the original passage," they say, "without external bias or traditionary prejudice, and bring to bear on it the modern historical method of examining ancient documents; and you will arrive at the conclusion that its real meaning is connected solely with the time and the circumstances of the writer, and ends as well as begins there. The conviction will force itself upon you, however reluctant you may be to entertain it, that the Christian interpreter, who refers the prophecy to the Jesus of the New Testament, reads into it a sense which is foreign to its purpose, and under the influence of theological prepossession applies it in a manner

which is a mere afterthought, or at best a loose and artificial adaptation to new and alien circumstances. In a word, take the passage fairly and honestly on its own showing, and you will not be able to stop short of the conclusion that it is only by sheer force of arbitrary accommodation that it can be made applicable to the Christ of history." Such is the objection to the Christian interpretation, which it is the object of these pages to examine and refute.



### § 3. *Acceptance of the Historical Method.*

Now to do this, it will not be necessary to dispute the view that this noble prophetic utterance had a real connection with the circumstances of the time at which it was delivered. The Christian application of it is in no way dependent on a denial of its contemporary origin and reference; in no degree requires us to assert that its entire meaning belonged to the distant future alone. All that is essential is to show that the meaning, if it began with contemporary events, did not end with them, and was not exhausted by them, but stretched on beyond them, and found its final terminus in Jesus Christ. We may accept one half of the objectors' position, that part, namely, which they base on the principles of historical criticism; and we may freely admit a contemporary ground and reference for the passage. All that we are bound to do is to show the baselessness of the other half of their position, that which denies to the passage any further reference, and which does not really rest upon any principle whatsoever of scientific criticism, but only on a bare assumption that it is impossible

for Hebrew prophecy to have more than a single historical application.

In truth, these objectors need to be reminded that they have no monopoly of the method of interpreting ancient documents by the historical or scientific method. The time has passed, when the orthodox expositors of the Messianic prophecies saw no difficulty in isolating them from their historical basis and context, and treating them as so many direct and literal predictions of far distant events. The entire domain of Christian exegesis has for some time been pervaded and possessed by the historical method; and we have only to look into the works of recent orthodox students of the prophetic literature of Israel, to see how thoroughly they accept the principles of that method, and rely upon them for the justification of the Christian sense. What one of them has said of himself, in the preface to his volume on the Book of Isaiah, is true of them generally. "I have handled it," says Sir E. Strachey, "by the method of our modern historians of Greece and Rome, and treated it as they—with thorough freedom and thorough reverence—treat the classical books." Indeed, a brief review of the line taken by such students, in dealing

with some of the leading Messianic prophecies, and of the results to which it has led them, will form the best introduction to our consideration of the Passion-prophecy which we seek to interpret.

§ 4. *The Hebrew Prophet.*

In the first place, then, the majority of Christian expositors now frankly accept the view that the true idea of the Hebrew prophet is that of a person sent to speak for God, as His messenger and the interpreter of His will. He is not to be conceived of only, or even chiefly, as a foreteller of events to come; but as a preacher of truth and righteousness, whose mission it was to bear witness for God to the understandings and hearts of his generation. To picture him as an unpractical recluse or a dreamy mystic, standing apart from the busy life around him, and throwing out vaticinations of the future, which were unintelligible riddles alike to his hearers and to himself, would be fatally to mistake his character. He dwelt in the midst of his people, and was a sharer of their interests and fortunes. As a living man he spoke to living men, throwing himself with practical energy into their affairs, dealing with their actual circumstances, and finding the occasion of his messages in the events which were unfolding before his eyes. To reprove and threaten his people for their sins, to recall them to the ways of their

God, to console them under their calamities, to animate their hopes, to declare to them the divine will for their guidance and edification — these were his principal functions; and these required him emphatically to be a man of the present, whose utterances were in vital connection with the thoughts, the wants, the dangers, the fears and hopes, of his age; and must by us be so considered and interpreted, to become intelligible in their primary historical sense.

To show how heartily this conception of the Hebrew prophet is accepted by recent orthodox critics, whose belief in his inspiration is unquestionable, the following quotations will be sufficient. For instance, Dean Perowne, in treating of the Messianic prophecies in the Psalms, invariably connects them with the circumstances in which they originated, and makes those circumstances, so far as they can be ascertained or reasonably conjectured, the starting-point of the interpretation of every predictive utterance. "Prophecy," he writes, "never seems wholly to forsake the ground of history. However extended the vista which stretches before him, that vista begins at the prophet's feet. The present is his home and his starting-point, though

he may make all the ages his own." To the same effect writes Dr. Edersheim, in his recent volumes on "Jesus the Messiah," when he pronounces it to be "a characteristic of Old Testament prophecy," that it "made the prophet ever a preacher of the present, even while he was a foreteller of the future." More explicitly Mr. Cheyne asserts "the great principle that a prophet's horizon is that of his own time; that he prophesied into the future, but not directly to the future<sup>1</sup>." So also Dr. Robertson Smith: "The prophet starts from present sin, present needs, present historical situations. There is no reason to think that a prophet ever received a revelation which was not spoken directly and pointedly to his own time<sup>2</sup>." So, too, Mr. Llewelyn Davies: "No genuine prophet has ever been the mechanical vehicle of enigmas, which waited for fulfilment as their key. The Hebrew prophet was an impassioned preacher, pouring forth warning and encouragements to his own generation<sup>3</sup>." Once more, Dean Burgon may be quoted nearly to the same effect: "The Jewish prophets were the great *teachers* of the

<sup>1</sup> Address at Church Congress, 1883.

<sup>2</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica, ninth edition, article "Bible."

<sup>3</sup> Contemporary Review, March, 1884.

nation. They were preachers of righteousness. . . . The essentially predictive portions of a prophetic writing are comparatively few. The term 'prophecy' does not by any means of necessity convey the notion of *prediction* at all<sup>1</sup>."

Such testimonies might be easily multiplied; but it will be of more importance to show, in the next place, how this conception of the Hebrew prophet has practically influenced the exposition of the Messianic prophecies by the modern orthodox school of divines. We shall find that, without in the least degree interfering with their conviction of the ultimate reference to Jesus Christ, it has led to the recognition of a primary historical sense—of an origin and ground in existing circumstances—and of a phraseology coloured by contemporary and local ideas. To show this, some leading examples must be introduced to the reader's notice.

<sup>1</sup> Sermon on Genesis iii. 15.

### § 5. *Application of the Historical Method.*

For our first illustration we may take Balaam's remarkable prophecy, called by Professor Delitzsch "the first properly Messianic prediction." "There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall arise out of Israel<sup>1</sup>." If we open the Speaker's Commentary at the place, we read as follows: "There can be no doubt that the victories of David were a partial accomplishment of these predictions . . . The star and sceptre of the prophecy point naturally rather to a line of princes than to an individual, or, rather, are emblems of the kingdom of Israel generally. Thus the victories of David and his successors, generation after generation, over Edom and Moab, are unquestionably recurring and progressive accomplishments of what Balaam foretold. But after all of them, the prophecy yet reaches forward to some further and culminating accomplishment." Here we observe the historical method, seeking and finding in existing circumstances a primary sense for the prediction.

Our second illustration shall be the great Deu-

<sup>1</sup> Numb. xxiv. 17.



teronomic promise of the Prophet like unto Moses, which is expressly declared by St. Peter to have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup>. "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me : unto him ye shall hearken<sup>2</sup>." Turning again to the Speaker's Commentary for an explanation, we find these remarks: "The tenor of the passage considered as a whole points to a series of prophets to be raised up as the exigencies of God's people might require, as no less promised here than is the One Divine Teacher to Whom they all gave witness . . . The word Prophet is probably here a collective noun . . . The passage thus appears to contemplate, as its secondary though still momentous sense, a succession of prophets, not necessarily an uninterrupted succession, but one which should never fail in Israel's emergency." Here, again, we have the recognition of an immediate sense, corresponding to the historical situation, besides the ultimate Messianic reference.

For a third illustration we may select a prediction, the terms of which, taken in connection with the application in the New Testament, seem to bind it down with unusual emphasis to the Divine

<sup>1</sup> Acts iii. 22, 23.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. xviii. 15.

Son of Mary. Yet here, too, we find expositors of unimpeachable orthodoxy adopting the explanation of a contemporary reference, through which the prophecy points on to the far-off divine event. "Therefore," said Isaiah to Ahaz, "the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel<sup>1</sup>." We turn to Bishop Wordsworth's Greek Testament, and in his notes on Matt. i. 22, 23, we find him distinguishing between "partial, preliminary, and preparatory fulfilments" of this prediction, and "its full and final accomplishment." Or we take up Dean Alford's Greek Testament, and find him asserting that the prophecy had "a literal fulfilment at the time," besides "its greater and special fulfilment in Christ."

Our remaining instances shall be selected from the Psalter, which of all the books of the Hebrew Canon is the richest in passages applied to Christ in the New Testament. Eleven Psalms may be noticed as those in which the Messianic element is especially conspicuous. These are Psalms ii, xvi, xxii, xl, xlv, lxviii, lxix, lxxii, cx, cxviii, cxxxii.

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah vii. 14.

Now if we ask whether among these eleven Psalms, the most emphatically Messianic to be found in the Psalter, there are any which are generally held by the modern orthodox school of expositors to be nothing else than literal, direct, exclusive predictions of Jesus Christ, and to have no immediate contemporary reference, the answer must be, Not one. The Speaker's Commentary, indeed, owing perhaps to the diversity of its authors, somewhat wavers between the traditional and the historical methods of interpretation. Yet even here, out of these eleven Psalms, seven are unequivocally held to have a primary sense, historically connected with the circumstances or times of their writers. Let us take these seven in order, and observe how the historical method is applied to them.

*Psalm xvi.* Here we have the great passage, urged with such force in the New Testament, by both St. Peter and St. Paul, as a divine prediction of our Lord's resurrection<sup>1</sup>. "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine holy one to see corruption." In the Commentary we read as follows: "The Psalmist first speaks of his trust in God, of his exclusive

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 25-31; xiii. 35.

dependence on Him, and declares that Jehovah is the portion of his inheritance and of his cup. Hence it follows that he can never be overthrown, that his heart and spirit are full of joy, and that even his flesh shall rest in hope, for his soul will not be left in Sheol, nor will God's holy one see corruption; fulness of joy and blessedness for evermore will be his at the right hand of God. . . . The Spirit of Christ which was in David as a prophet moved and controlled his utterances, so that while they expressed fully his own yearnings, they signified beforehand the glory that should follow in the resurrection of Christ."

*Psalm xl.* From this Psalm the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews quotes<sup>1</sup>, as predictive of Jesus Christ, the verses, "Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire; mine ears hast Thou opened; burnt-offering and sin-offering hast Thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do Thy will, O my God." According to the Commentary this Psalm, in its immediate sense, expresses the writer's own feelings; and the passage quoted means that "David presented himself

<sup>1</sup> Heb. x. 5-9.

before God in spirit, with the book of the law describing his duties and rights."

*Psalm lxviii.* The triumphant ascription in this Psalm, "Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive, Thou hast received gifts for men," is adduced by St. Paul as a prophetic description of our Lord's ascension<sup>1</sup>. But the Commentary tells us that this is only an accommodated sense, and that it is the glory of Jehovah which is celebrated. "As a whole the Psalm cannot be considered as referring to Christ's kingdom. To apply it to Christian times, and add to it Christian *meditations*, is not hard, but is foreign to the purpose; and interferes with the exhibition of an original majestic Scripture in its simplicity and intense instructiveness to those for whom it was composed."

*Psalm lxix.* At least four passages from this sorrowful Psalm are referred in the New Testament to Christ. It is He Who is said to be intended in the mournful complaints, "They hated me without a cause<sup>2</sup>," "The reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon me<sup>3</sup>;" "They gave me also gall for my meat, and in

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iv. 8.

<sup>2</sup> John xv. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. xv. 3.

my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink<sup>1</sup>;" and also in the striking phrase, "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up<sup>2</sup>." Yet the Commentary does not scruple to understand the Psalm as being throughout a genuine expression of the writer's own feelings, only "so modified as to find its true and complete fulfilment in the person of Christ, of Whom he was a type." "The devout reader," it is added, "who sees throughout a portraiture of Christ, under the veil of an imperfect but really typical representative, attains in all probability most nearly to the true meaning of the Psalm."

*Psalm lxxii.* This glowing and splendid ode in honour of the ideal Davidic King, although not quoted in the New Testament, has with considerable justice been styled the most really Messianic of all the Psalms. But the account given of it in the Commentary connects it with Jesus Christ not directly, but only in a derived and secondary sense. It was probably, we are informed, "composed for liturgical recitation, a form in which the people might give expression to loyal and devout aspirations, connected with the head of the theocratic kingdom. Hence the

<sup>1</sup> John xix. 28.

<sup>2</sup> John ii. 17.

Messianic tone which pervades the whole. The author felt himself to be the representative of the ideal and future Messiah."

*Psalm cxviii.* The Messianic character of this bright, exulting Psalm, is especially manifest in the famous verse repeatedly applied to Christ in the New Testament<sup>1</sup>, "The stone which the builders refused is become the head-stone of the corner;" and in the ascription, "Hosanna! Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord<sup>2</sup>!" Yet even to this Psalm the Commentary does not attribute any direct reference to Jesus Christ, but describes it as a festal hymn, a song of thanksgiving "for recent blessings, and probably written, in the first instance, to thank God for mercies shown to one pre-eminent among His people."

*Psalm cxxxii.* From this Psalm St. Peter quotes as a definite prediction of our Lord's exaltation to David's throne<sup>3</sup> the following verse, "The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David, He will not turn from it, Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne." Turning once more to the Commentary, we are instructed that this reference is not the primary one, and that the

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxi. 42; Mark xii. 10; Luke xx. 17; Acts iv. 11; 1 Pet. ii. 4.      <sup>2</sup> Matt. xxi. 9; xxiii. 39.      <sup>3</sup> Acts ii. 30.

Psalm in its primitive sense is "a prayer for the continuance of David's line," in answer to which Jehovah "proclaims His love for Zion, and determination to rest in it for ever, to bless it and its inhabitants always with choicest blessings, and to raise up a horn for His anointed, for the confusion of his enemies and his own perpetual renown."

Thus out of the eleven chief Messianic Psalms no less than seven are explained in this most orthodox of Commentaries by the modern historical method, and shown to refer in the first instance to "the living Psalmist," or to some contemporary circumstance, and only in a remoter or typical sense to the Christ of the Gospels. But that is not all. In regard to the remaining four, if any such immediate reference is questioned, still as much as this is conceded, that they are characterised by "a trait common to all prophecy," namely, that "the imagery throughout has a local character," and that "the position, enemies, and sufferings of the person are described in language suggested by external circumstances." This admission brings them to a considerable extent under the historical method, inasmuch as it allows that even in these Psalms



the Messianic hope was embodied in forms which were not literally true, but were local, contemporary, and transient.

If now we turn to Dean Perowne's somewhat later treatise on the Psalter, we discover a much more unqualified adhesion to the historical method. He sets out with the assertion that "we may see in every Psalm, which may reasonably be regarded as Messianic, a primary reference to the writer and his own circumstances." He does not shrink from interpreting on this principle even the great Psalm of the Cross (Ps. xxii), which he considers to have been probably "composed by one of the exiles during the Babylonish captivity," with primary reference to the sufferings of himself and his fellow exiles. The only Psalm to which the Dean hesitates to apply the method in its fullest extent is Ps. cx; not, he says, because of anything in the Psalm itself, but because of our Lord's use of it to put the Pharisees to silence. Were it not for this, he allows that there would be no difficulty in seeing in it a primary reference "to David, as the theocratic king," and in taking the sublime words as "written by some poet of David's time, who would naturally speak of David as his lord." Bishop

Thirlwall, however, whom he consulted, and whose reply he prints, expressed the opinion that "we are left very much in the same position with regard to the Psalm as if our Lord had not asked those questions about it;" and the Dean winds up the discussion with remarking that, even if David was here directly predicting his divine Son, he was "not wholly lifted out of his own age and time, but was suffered to conceive of Him as an earthly monarch fighting bloody battles with his enemies."

But as we proceed in our enquiry, we discover in various orthodox expositors a still fuller acceptance of the historical method. Thus of three out of the four Psalms, partially excepted from this method in the Speaker's Commentary, Archdeacon Farrar writes, in his "Early Days of Christianity"—"No one will question that the 2nd Psalm was originally a song of trust and anticipation in times of gathering war; that the 45th Psalm was an *epithalamium* for Solomon or one of his successors; that even the 110th Psalm must have had a contemporary and historic meaning." Canon Westcott, in his "Revelation of the Father," unhesitatingly employs the great Messianic passage in Psalm ii, "Thou art My

Son, this day have I begotten thee," to show how, under the older dispensation, the national sonship of Israel was officially concentrated in the theocratic monarch. Hengstenberg, in his treatise on the Psalms, abandoned his earlier view of the exclusive reference of even Psalm xxii to Christ, and found himself compelled to take it as primarily written of the ideal righteous man, the true Israelite, and only in the secondary or typical sense of Christ, in Whom that conception culminates. Of the same great Passion-Psalm Delitzsch, in his recent work on "The Old Testament History of Redemption," says that "it is Messianic on account of David's Messianic view of himself. He regarded himself as the Messiah of God. Even where the Spirit of prophecy typically elevates the expressions of David concerning himself to prophecy, the Messiah has no objectivity apart from David or above him." By the same learned and orthodox writer the historical origin and reference of Psalm xlv is conjectured to be the marriage of Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat; and of Psalm cx David's war with Ammon. Once more, by Mr. Cheyne, Psalm xlv is referred, primarily, to some "contemporary Davidic king," and Psalms ii, lxxii,

and ex to an "ideal Davidic monarch;" the last-named but one being considered as a prayer rather than a prediction.

Now all the foregoing specimens of the interpretation of Messianic prophecy have been taken from the works of recent expositors and critics, who stand in the first rank of the students of Holy Scripture, and are no rationalists, no disbelievers in revelation, inspiration, or supernatural prediction, but strenuously maintain that the true ultimate reference of the prophecies in question is to none other than Jesus Christ. To say, then, that this final reference is maintained by those only who neglect or deny the well-established principles of the historical method would be entirely untrue. It is on those very principles, as we have seen, that these expositors proceed. They endeavour to put themselves back into the age and the position of the prophet, and to realise the historical circumstances in which his message originated, and the primary meaning which it must have had for himself and his contemporaries. They seek the key to his sayings in his environment, to use the modern phrase; that is, in the thoughts and ideas, the urgent wants, the prevalent sins, the dangers, the fears

and hopes, of the actual world around him. It is not through isolating his utterances from their historical ground, but by connecting them as closely as possible with that ground, that they arrive at what seems to them to be the higher and diviner outcome of his inspiration, namely, its reaching on, through and by means of the primary sense, to its final terminus in the Messiah of Christendom.

“Through, and by means of, the primary sense;” that is the essential characteristic of the method of this modern school of expositors. They do not insist on finding, scattered about in the Old Testament, unconnected with the subject in hand, or with the circumstances of the time, direct and literal vaticinations of the incidents related in the sacred story of the Gospels. The prophetic revelation of the Christ to come, which they discover in the ancient Scriptures, is chiefly conveyed by means of typical prefigurations; or is found underlying the forms assumed by the national expectations of a grandeur and glory never, perhaps, to be literally realised. Not but that, in some of the prophetical phrases, this school frankly recognises a wonderful verbal correspondence, suggestive of a “pre-established

harmony," between the typical prefiguration and the evangelical fulfilment; yet it is not upon such minute correspondences that the proof of the final reference to Christ is chiefly based. What Mr. Cheyne has said on this point, in his exposition of the Book of Jeremiah in the Pulpit Commentary, well represents the view of the historical school. "As a rule, the details of a prophetic description cannot be pressed; they are mainly imaginative elaborations of a great central truth or fact. Occasionally, however, regarding the prophecies in the light of Gospel times, it is almost impossible not to observe that the Spirit of Christ which was in the prophets has overruled their expressions, so that they correspond more closely to facts than could have been reasonably anticipated. Such superabundant favours to believers in inspiration occur repeatedly in the prophecies respecting Christ. They may, of course, occur elsewhere for a sufficient reason, but we have no right to be surprised if we do not meet with them." Of the subordinate place held by such special or verbal fulfilments in the proof of the Messianic reference, a striking illustration may be cited from Dr. Wright's Bampton Lectures on the Book of Zechariah. Speak-

ing of the great Messianic prediction, "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee; He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass<sup>1</sup>;" he remarks, "The prophecy would have been as truly and really fulfilled, if the triumphal procession of Palm Sunday had never taken place."

Speaking, then, broadly, the historical school of expositors proceed on the principle (to use the words of the Pulpit Commentary on the Acts), that "the higher Messianic references of the New Testament usually underlie an immediate relation to historical events or individuals." The prelusive revelation of the Christ of the Gospels, thus discerned in Hebrew prophecy, is chiefly made by means of human types, human actions, functions, and sufferings. According to this view the Messiah depicted in the prophetic Scriptures is the saintly king, priest, prophet, witness, or sufferer of the Old Dispensation, *idealised*—carried to the utmost perfection of which human nature is capable, when consecrated by the full, unlimited indwelling of the Spirit of God. In other words, the revelation is through humanity; it is on the lines of the human type,

<sup>1</sup> Zech. ix. 9.

extended, spiritualised, elevated to an ideal perfection, and thus rendered capable of bringing to complete realisation that divine redemptive purpose, by which the ages have been pervaded and linked together.

Here we reach the cardinal point of the controversy in which we are engaged, the point at which the orthodox expositor entirely parts company with the rationalist. Both admit a primary historical reference in the prophetic Scriptures; but while the rationalist asserts that with this reference the meaning of the prophecies must terminate and be exhausted, the orthodox expositor maintains that, unless they mean more than this, they remain but half-explained, and that no treatment of them is adequate which does not recognise in them a more mysterious element, pointing forwards to an ulterior fulfilment in Jesus Christ. How this extension of their reference is justified we have now briefly to notice.



§ 6. *Justification of the reference to Christ.*

In part, the justification of the Messianic reference is found in the actual phraseology of the prophecies. Generally speaking, there is more in them than can be fairly accounted for by the immediate historical occasion. The language rises above the facts present to the writer, and assumes an amplitude, a warmth, a grandeur, disproportioned to the circumstances out of which it grew. As we read, we can scarcely avoid feeling that the prophet idealises his subject, connects it with a vaster future, and finds on it an anticipation of greater issues, of which the matter actually in hand is but an imperfect foreshadowing. As the present writer has elsewhere remarked, "Beginning with the present emergency, the contemporary fears or sufferings or sins, and delivering such messages of encouragement, or such reproofs, consolations, or warnings as the immediate occasion demanded, the prophet soon breaks away from the comparatively petty occasion, and lifting his glance to the heavens, and widening it to the ends of the earth, rises into sublime strains of judgment, deliverance, or triumph, such as entirely

transcend the interests and events of his own day<sup>1</sup>." Now it is this remarkable characteristic of the prophetic utterances that needs to be explained; and it is because the rationalistic view, which denies to those utterances any other than a contemporary reference, completely fails to explain it, that we venture to charge that view with being inconsistent with the facts of the case, and critically insufficient and untenable.

This, however, is only a small part of the argument for the ultimate reference of these prophecies to Jesus Christ. That rests mainly on the continuity of the redemptive purpose and scheme, of which, on any fair and adequate interpretation, the Bible is the record; a purpose and scheme which had their historical inauguration and commencement in the Call of Abraham, and at last culminated in the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of the Christ of the Gospels. As we take the sacred books in their chronological order, we observe the onward movement of this divine plan, marked indeed by various vicissitudes and seeming retrogressions and failures, yet still steadily pursuing its way through every struggle and reverse, till in the glorified Jesus its triumph

<sup>1</sup> Argument from Prophecy, p. 64.

is assured. In the unfolding of this scheme all the inspired prophets and teachers, all the faithful witnesses and sufferers for God, all the saintly leaders and warriors and kings of the older dispensation, were participators and agents; in them, and in the events in which they were actors, the principles and method of the scheme were more or less illustrated, or its general course and issue were dimly foreshadowed. And inasmuch as, according to the conception of this divine scheme presented to us in the New Testament, it was Christ, as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and the predestined Reconciler of all things unto God, Who was Himself the energising Power of the whole scheme, which culminated at last in His own Person and work upon earth; it follows that of Him the entire redemptive evolution may be justly considered as a sort of mystic mirror, or shadowy prefiguration. Hence each personage, each event, which contributed to the advance of the divine purpose may be taken to have meant something more than it seemed to mean at the time, and to have had more than a merely local or "private interpretation"<sup>1</sup>; in some way or other there may be discerned in it a reflection

<sup>1</sup> 2 Pet. i. 20.

or shadow of the Christ to come. It is His Person, His witness, His self-oblation, His passion and triumph and kingdom, that we are thus justified in seeing, faintly and fragmentarily imaged, in consecrated king and priest, in faithful witness and self-devoting sufferer, in painful conflict and glorious victory, as age after age through these the divine purpose was unfolded, and the way of the Lord was prepared.

It is but another way of expressing the same idea, when we say that the corporate Israel itself was a standing type of the Messiah. That is, Israel abstracted from its unbelief and shame, and viewed in the light of the divine purpose; Israel in its assigned function as the elect nation, the very reason of whose existence was that it should become the channel and instrument of the world's redemption, according to God's promise to its forefather Abraham, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed<sup>1</sup>."

How favourite a conception this is with our recent orthodox expositors a few quotations will show.

In his notes on Gal. iii, Bishop Lightfoot writes, "In Christ the Hebrew race was summed

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xii. 3.

up; in Him it fulfilled its purpose, and became a blessing to the whole earth. He was not only the representative but the embodiment of the race. The people of Israel is the type of Christ." To the same effect are Dr. Edersheim's remarks: "The Messiah and His history are not presented in the Old Testament as something separated from, or superadded to, Israel. The history, the institutions, and the predictions of Israel run up into Him. He is the typical Israelite, nay, typical Israel itself—alike the crown, the completion, and the representative of Israel." In like manner Dean Perowne, speaking of "the acknowledged typical character of the nation," and asserting "the great principle of a typical predictiveness in all Jewish history," goes on to say, "Israel is not only a type of Christ; there is an organic unity between Him and them. Whatever is true of Israel in a lower sense, is true in its highest sense of Christ." Bishop Wordsworth, in commenting on Matt. ii, asserts the same view of the relation between Israel and Christ, when he writes, "We are taught to regard Christ as one with His Church in all ages of her history, and what is said by the Holy Spirit concerning the *literal* Israel as God's son, as having a prelusive reference to

what is declared in the Gospel concerning the only-begotten Son of God." A similar sentiment is expressed in Dean Alford's comment on the same chapter, when he calls "the expected Messiah the general antitype of the events of the typical dispensation." To the same effect writes Sir E. Strachey: "The history of the Hebrews is a perpetual prophecy . . . Christ's work was partially and symbolically effected in the preceding ages of the people . . . What was true of the King of the nation, its real Head and Representative, must be true of the nation itself, in as far as it acknowledged Him, walked in His light, was clothed with His righteousness, and actuated by His Spirit." Nor is the meaning different, when Mr. Cheyne speaks of "the Messianic and missionary functions of Israel," and says that "God overruled the actions and words of His servants so as to cast a shadow of the coming Christ." But, after all, the idea of the typical character of the chosen nation is by no means a modern one. St. Augustine explicitly enunciates it when he says that "Israel was by some special mystery a prophetic nation<sup>1</sup>"; and that "the people of Israel itself, through those things which happened

<sup>1</sup> Contra Paganos.

to them in figure, was nothing else than a prophet of Christ<sup>1</sup>." Nor indeed did the idea originate with Christian expositors at all, but came to them from the Synagogue. For Dr. Edersheim has recently made it plain, that what he calls in one place "the organic unity of Israel and the Messiah," and in another, "the unity of Israel and the Messiah in prophetic vision," was a familiar idea with the earliest Rabbinical commentators, and underlay the whole of their complex Messianic application of the Old Testament.

It appears, then, that the ultimate reference of Hebrew prophecy to the historical Christ of the Gospels is mainly based, by recent orthodox expositors, on the unique character of Israel, as the people chosen and fashioned by God to become what may be called the Messianic nation, the anointed or Christ-nation, the nation charged with a redemptive mission and office for the world. It was in this character that it was prophesied of as the destined Seed, in which all the nations of the earth should be blessed<sup>2</sup>. It was under this character that it was present to the mind of God, when He said of it to Moses,

<sup>1</sup> De Bono Viduitatis.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. xxii. 18.

"Israel is My son, even My first-born<sup>1</sup>;" and by Hosea, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called My son out of Egypt<sup>2</sup>." It was this character which was recognised in our Lord's saying to the woman of Samaria, "Salvation is of the Jews<sup>3</sup>;" proceeds out of them, and comes through them. It was by virtue of this character that each successive representative of the nation, each witness, deliverer, and king who bore part in carrying out its redemptive mission, was a type or prefiguration of the last and greatest Israelite, in Whom these offices were concentrated, and through Whom the divine purpose attained its completion; even the personal Christ of God, the final outcome and flower and embodiment of the nation, to produce Whom it had been originally called into existence, and was then guided through

<sup>1</sup> Exod. iv. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Hosea xi. 1.

<sup>3</sup> John iv. 22. Compare Archbishop Trench's comment: "Wherever Christ's words are accepted as rule and law, these words of His, spoken by the well of Jacob, will vindicate for Israel in that period which went before the Incarnation a position altogether different from that of any other nation of the earth. Israel was the channel through which the salvation of God should be conveyed to the world. It was the true aloe tree, in many respects unsightly enough, but which should blossom at last in one 'bright consummate flower,' and having so fulfilled its mission should wither and die." (*Studies in the Gospels*, p. 117.)



nearly two millenniums of mysterious vicissitudes, sorrows, and deliverances. It was because of the same character that each prophet or sacred poet, as he foresaw some immediate step in the advancing scheme of redemption, or sang of some near prospect of blessedness for his nation and the world, was enabled to rise out of the surrounding circumstances, to leap over long centuries of imperfection and trouble, and to connect his strain with the final result, to be accomplished in God's good time by the passion and glorification of the Son of man, Who is also the Son of God. It was in consequence of the same typical character of the elect nation, that the New Testament use of Hebrew prophecy was no arbitrary or violent accommodation of it to facts which had no vital connection with it; and that our risen Lord, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets," could "expound in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself<sup>1</sup>."

Nor is it any substantial objection to this view that the history of the ancient Israel is strewn thickly with rebellions and failures, and ends in its final rejection for unbelief. The Messianic Israel, the Israel which is truly a type of Christ,

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiv. 27.

is the Israel of God's idea and purpose, which as it were underlies the natural visible Israel, as the ideal underlies the marred and imperfect reality. And this ideal Israel, in spite of all the sins and the perverseness of the nation, was no failure, but accomplished that for which God had chosen and called it to be His servant. It did prepare the way of the Lord. It did produce the Christ in Whom it culminated. It was the cradle of the kingdom of heaven. It was the parent of the Church of the living God. Man's sin could not make the divine word of none effect. The gifts and calling of God, in His choice of Israel, were irrevocable. No real failure was possible of the elect race, of whom it could be said with St. Paul, "whose is the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom is Christ as concerning the flesh, Who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen<sup>1</sup>."

Thus far we have been laying a foundation for the discussion of the great Passion-prophecy, which is our proper subject. By reviewing the method of interpretation followed by recent or-

<sup>1</sup> Rom. ix. 4, 5.

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thodox expositors of the historical school, we have not only vindicated them from the taunt of the rationalistic critics, but have provided ourselves with a tried and approved method of proceeding in our task. We have not now to seek for a principle of interpretation; all we have to do is to take the historical method as already exemplified, and, applying it fairly to the celebrated prophecy before us, to see to what results it leads us.

**PART II.**

**THE INTERPRETATION.**





## PART II.

### THE INTERPRETATION.

#### § 1. *The great Passion-prophecy.*

**B**ETWEEN the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, and the three preceding verses, there is an organic connection, which requires them to be taken together as parts of the same section of the book. And as in some respects our Authorized Version needs correction, especially where it speaks of the sufferings of Jehovah's servant as if they were still future, a version of the whole passage is here given; the emendations being partly borrowed, on the Christian side, from Mr. Cheyne<sup>1</sup>, and partly, on the Jewish side, from the learned Dr. Schiller-Szinessy<sup>2</sup>, the Reader in Rabbinic and Talmudic

<sup>1</sup> The Prophecies of Isaiah, second edition.

<sup>2</sup> Exposition of Isaiah lii. 13 and liii.

Literature in the University of Cambridge. The suggestion of the different speakers in the passage is chiefly taken from the latter.

*Jehovah speaks.*

“Behold, My servant shall deal wisely [or, shall prosper]; he shall be exalted, and lifted up, and be very high. According as many were appalled at thee—so disfigured was his visage from a man’s, and his form from that of the children of men—so shall he attract many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which had not been told them shall they see, and that which they had not heard shall they perceive.”

*Israelites or Gentiles of later times speak.*

“Who believed what we heard, and to whom did Jehovah’s arm become manifest? For he grew up before him as a weakly shoot, and as a root out of parched ground; he had no beauty nor majesty; and if we looked at him, there was no comeliness that we should delight in him. He was despised and deserted by men; a man of pains and familiar with grief; as one from whom men hide their faces; despised, and we counted him for nought. But surely our griefs he bore,

and our sorrows he carried them; yet we regarded him as stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But because of our transgressions he was pierced, and because of our iniquities he was crushed; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and through his stripes we have been healed. All we like a flock went astray; we turned everyone to his own way; and Jehovah laid upon him the iniquity of us all."

*The Prophet speaks.*

"He was oppressed, but he let himself be humbled, and opened not his mouth; as a sheep that is led to the slaughter, and as a ewe that before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth. By an unrighteous sentence he was taken away; and who of his generation considered that he was cut off from the land of the living, and for the transgression of my people [or, of the nations] was he smitten. And his grave was appointed with the wicked, and with the rich [or, proud] in his death; although he had done no wrong, and there was no deceit in his mouth. But it pleased Jehovah to crush him, and put him to grief; laying down his soul an offering for guilt, he shall see a seed, he [or, which] shall



prolong his days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied."

*Jehovah speaks.*

"By his knowledge [or, piety] shall My servant, the righteous one, make the many righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I give him a portion among the great, and with the mighty shall he divide the spoil; because he poured out his soul unto death, and let himself be numbered with the rebellious; but he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

§ 2. *Historical circumstances of the Prophecy.*

In approaching this very striking and pathetic composition, to ascertain its meaning by the historical method of enquiry, the first thing to be noticed is that the passage is not an isolated section, or an utterance complete in itself, which might be interpreted without reference to any context, but is a component portion of a great continuous prophecy, in the midst of which it is embedded; a prophecy which begins with the 40th chapter of the canonical Book of Isaiah, and continues, with the exception perhaps of a few of the later chapters, to the end of the Book. This magnificent prophecy, unique in the sacred volume for the affluence of its poetical imagery and burning emotion, is aptly designated by the Rabbis of Israel "The book of consolations," from its opening words, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people:" and we may say of it, to use Sir E. Strachey's words, that it "flows on like a river, poured forth at one time from a heart entirely filled with and possessed by the Holy Spirit." Whatsoever the precise date of its composition, this at least is plain, that the *point of view* from

which the Prophet writes is the time of the captivity in Babylon. Out of the depths of the desolation of his people he lifts up his voice, at a moment when the night of sorrow is at its darkest, and, humanly speaking, hope had almost expired. To understand his utterances we must try to put ourselves back into his position, and to see with the mind's eye what he looked upon, when the Spirit of prophecy came upon him, and inspired him with the message of comfort and hope.

What did he see around him? The shattered wreck of his nation; a miserable, fainting remnant torn away from the land which God had given to their fathers, reduced to abject slavery, and held in the iron grasp of a heathen conqueror. Their holy city had been levelled with the ground, their sacred temple had been consumed by fire, their hallowed soil was given over to strangers; as to its corporate and political character the elect nation was practically annihilated. Such was the scene of failure and ruin upon which the Prophet gazed with tearful eyes. Jerusalem, to use his own words, "had drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of His fury; she had drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling, and had wrung them out."

Let us endeavour to imagine to ourselves what bitter perplexities—what conflicts with despair—must have agitated the minds of the sorrowing captives by the waters of Babylon, as they asked themselves the meaning of this tremendous catastrophe, by which the people of God's election had been crushed. Had the vocation of Israel proved a failure, and had God abandoned His purpose, and cast away the nation which He had set apart to be His witness to the world? What had become of the promise to Abraham, "Thou shalt be a father of many nations, and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed<sup>1</sup>?" To gather in heathendom to the feet of Jehovah was the very reason of Israel's existence, the purpose for which God had created it; and now Israel was itself swallowed up by heathendom, and compelled to confess with bitter self-upbraidings, "We have not wrought any deliverance in the earth; neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen<sup>2</sup>." Was it all over with the nation to which so high and glorious a mission had been confided? Was the light of hope at last extinguished, the covenant of God annulled, and the divine kingdom indefinitely postponed?

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xviii. 4; xxii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. xxvi. 18.

Such was the awful gloom out of the midst of which rose the voice of prophecy ; such the despairing questions to which an answer was put into the Prophet's mouth. How does he break the silence ? " Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God." The divine promise could not be broken : " The word of our God shall stand for ever." Israel, though for the moment crushed and shattered, was not cast off or thrown aside : it was still Jehovah's servant, through whom the redemptive work, ordained of old, should go forward to completion. " Thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not, I will help thee. This people have I formed for myself ; they shall show forth my praise." Yes, sooner should the mother forget her sucking child than Jehovah forget Israel ; sooner should the mountains depart and the hills be removed, than the covenant of Jehovah's peace with Israel be annulled<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Chaps. xlix. 15 ; liv. 10.

§ 3. *The special ground-thought of the Prophecy.*

Such was the general tenour of the message by which, in the depths of the night of sorrow, the Prophet was commissioned to give assurance of the dawning of a brighter day, wherein the divine purpose in the calling of Israel should be accomplished. But, looking more closely into his strain, especially where it seems to transcend the ordinary personifications characteristic of Hebrew poetry, and to gather up his announcement in an individualising climax, a distinct and peculiar train of thought arrests our attention. Prosperity should return to the nation at the season appointed by the divine counsels; but what place, it might be asked, was held in those counsels by the sore agony which Israel was meanwhile enduring at the hands of Babylon? Was this to be looked upon merely as a deplorable interruption, caused by the people's sin, of the progress of God's great scheme of redemption? or had it a higher meaning and a real value, as being itself an inseparable part of that scheme, a necessary stage in the evolution of the divine purpose? This is the question which the Prophet seems to have been specially inspired

to answer. Other prophets had foretold the glorious day which should follow the night of weeping, and had sung in glowing strains the restoration and the greatness reserved for the people of the covenant. But to this Prophet it appears to have been given to see more deeply into the mystery of Israel's suffering. Viewed externally and superficially, all this woe had been caused by the people's sins; it had fallen on their guilty head as a divine chastisement. But in the purpose of God, and viewed in His light, it had another and very different aspect, which for the encouragement of the sufferers this Prophet of consolation was instructed to declare.

To express this aspect a beautiful image is supplied by the Synagogue. In the Rabbinical literature, as Dr. Edersheim tells us, Israel, in its humiliation and sorrow, is often compared to an olive-tree, "whose fruit, crushed beneath a heavy weight, would yield the precious oil by which the divine light would shed its brightness through the night of heathendom." Let us again approach the prophecy with this idea in our minds, and see if some of its obscurer parts do not become luminous. Here is the elect nation, charged with a Messianic function, and still bearing in its

mangled bosom the mystery of redemption—here it is passing by God's appointment through the deep waters of affliction. How can this baptism of suffering be other than a part of the process, through which it moves on to the fulfilment of its calling of God? What more natural than that the wasting and agony before the Prophet's eyes should shape itself to his mind into a sort of redemptive passion, endured by Israel, as Jehovah's chosen servant, in pursuance of its divine destiny to be the channel of blessing to the world? Others might cast a contemptuous glance on its misery, and be satisfied with saying that God had smitten it as its sins deserved. But to the Prophet's mind, illuminated by the revealing Spirit, the suffering would assume a vicarious aspect, and be viewed as instrumental to the advancement of God's saving purpose. The holy nation, bowed down to the dust and trampled upon by the heathen oppressor, would appear as if agonising in sore travail, and bringing forth in labour-pangs the universal kingdom of God.

Pursuing the same line of thought, the bursts of prophetic rapture which follow the description of the travail and passion will, in their immediate sense, express the glorious consequences



which should ensue from Israel's sorrows. Those sorrows should not be in vain, but should accomplish that for which they had been sent. Not a pang but should be fruitful of joy, not a stroke but should be instrumental to salvation. Blessed day when this bitter travail should be over, and its glorious issue be manifested! Let us listen as the Prophet pours forth his exulting strains, of which the following may be called the key-words: "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear. Enlarge the place of thy tent. Thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left. Thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles. The God of the whole earth shall thy Redeemer be called. Thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew thee not shall run unto thee. The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. The Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."

Viewing, then, the sublime prophecy as rooted in, and growing out of, the circumstances actually present to the Prophet's mind, we discover its peculiar ground-thought and starting-point in the conception of the elect nation, as the servant of Jehovah, going through its agony and passion in

Babylon, in fulfilment of its Messianic vocation to be the channel and instrument of God's salvation to the world. This ground-thought and starting-point must, of course, be distinguished from the full meaning and final goal of the prophecy. To these we shall endeavour to advance hereafter. All that we have at present is the immediate and primary idea, suggested by the Prophet's environment, which would form the basis of whatever further conception of the divine purpose he might be led on to declare, under the illuminating guidance of the Spirit of prophecy. And it is to be noticed that this conception of Israel's sufferings, which we have supposed to underlie the prophecy and to be fundamental to it, is beyond question historically true. Dr. Edersheim is certainly justified in saying, that "it were a one-sided view to regard the Babylonish exile as only a punishment for Israel's sin." The captivity in that proud heathen city was, in sober truth, the seed-time of the kingdom of God. That crushing of Israel set free the divine word from its imprisonment within the narrow bounds of Hebraism, and brought it into that contact with the Gentile world which prepared the way for the preaching of the Gospel.

The planting of Jewish colonies in the great centres of civilization, the consequent infiltration of Jewish thought into Greek and Roman literature, and the influence upon Judaism itself of its intercourse with the Gentile world,—all these things, which are traceable back to the cruel shattering of the sacred nation by the empire of Babylon, played such an important part in the subsequent propagation of Christianity, and in the founding of the Christian Church, that it is scarcely possible to conceive how, in the absence of them, the Gospel could have gone forth, conquering and to conquer. At any rate, the “Acts of the Apostles” must, in that case, have been told in a totally different form from that in which it has come down to our hands. As a simple matter of fact, it was through the crushing and captivity of His elect people that God, in His all-wise Providence, prepared the world to receive the Gospel of His Son.

§ 4. *The Rationalistic position already untenable.*

Let us pause for a moment at this point of the argument to observe that, even were we to end here in our enquiry into the meaning of the whole prophecy of the "book of consolations," the rationalistic position would already have become untenable. The heart of that position is the assertion that the prophecy refers to Israel in Babylon, *and to nothing else*. The circumstances mentioned in it, the rationalist argues, are all political and national; they relate solely to the fortunes of the nation in captivity and restoration; and even the partial analogy, which at first sight they may appear to present to those of the Christ of the Gospels, vanishes altogether before an intelligent and accurate reading of the prophecy. "Not so fast!" we are tempted to say in reply. To prove the historical reference to the fortunes and functions of Israel is a very different thing from disproving an equally real reference to Christ. We have already seen grounds for the view, that the whole story of the sacred nation of God's election, including and culminating in the Messiah, has an ideal unity,

and embodies the conception that Israel itself, in its corporate and collective capacity, had a Messianic character and calling, the perfect realisation of which was reserved for the Person who was to be the final outcome and representative of the nation. We have further seen how it follows from this ideal or organic unity of the whole evolution of Israel's story, that the Messiah Who completes it was prefigured and typified, both by the corporate nation in its calling as Jehovah's Servant, and by its leading individual members so far as they, from time to time, represented it in its Messianic function. This view of the relation between the national Israel and the Messiah to come is by no means exclusively Christian. It is equally the view of the Rabbinical expositors, before as well as after the rise of Christianity. Neither does it depend on any forced or mystic interpretation of the sacred records. It has a firm basis in the conception, that the entire development of the Hebrew nation and its religion reveals a divine scheme and order; a conception without which the Old Testament would be unintelligible, and a large part of its prophetic phraseology no better than extravagant rhapsody. But if this view of the

relation between Israel and the Messiah be accepted, then the admitted historical reference to Israel of the great prophecy before us, in its primary sense, so far from diverting it from the Messiah, binds it closely to Him in its ulterior and final meaning. Let it be acknowledged that, in their higher and ideal character, the main lines of Israel's story are typical: and it must be confessed that this must above all hold good of such a cardinal and catastrophic event as the crushing of the nation beneath the heel of Babylon, and its subsequent exile and misery, followed by its marvellous restoration. If a type at all of the Messiah, Israel must surely have been a type of Him here. Here most emphatically must Bishop Wordsworth's remark be applicable, that "all the afflictions and all the consolations of the literal Israel find their fulfilment in Christ<sup>1</sup>."

Even then did the great prophecy itself, in its language or phraseology, convey no direct suggestion of a reference beyond the national Israel, we should be amply justified in discerning in it a typical foreshadowing of the Messiah's humiliation and Passion. Beneath the veil of the

<sup>1</sup> Note on Matt. ii. 17.

collective people, suffering by divine appointment in the evolution of its Messianic destiny, the Christ of God, in Whom that destiny was to be wrought out and completed, would be not obscurely imaged to the eye of faith.

§ 5. *The transition to a higher meaning.*

But it is not true that there is nothing in the terms of the prophecy to suggest a reference beyond the collective or national Israel. If we examine it more closely than we have hitherto done, we find in it features which raise another image before our minds. There are parts in it so strongly individualised, parts in which the "Servant of Jehovah," whom it sets before us, stands out in such distinct personality, as to forbid any candid reader to be satisfied with taking them merely as poetical personifications of the collective nation. There are four such passages to be particularly noticed.

The first is ch. xlii. 1-7, which runs as follows: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my Spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgment unto the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench; he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the



earth ; and the isles shall wait for his law. Thus saith God the Lord, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out : he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it ; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein : I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles ; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house."

The feature to be observed here is the intensely personal character of the language. The corporate Israel of the preceding chapter appears to have for a moment dropped out of sight, and given place to an individual Servant of Jehovah. Let the reader, simply yielding himself to the impression of the passage, ask himself what it naturally describes, and he must answer, A Person, not a nation. If he tries, as he attentively goes through the verses, to keep in his mind the personified people, he will find the effort a failure. His conviction will be that more than legitimate personification is here ; that in some way, or under some impulse, the Prophet's thought has glided on from

what was unquestionably his primary idea, till, instead of the collective people, some individual personage stands out before his imagination.

And this conviction will be deepened when an advance is made to the next of the passages in question, which is ch. xlix. 5, 6:—

“And now, saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the ends of the earth.”

The especial point requiring notice here is the distinction which is expressly made between the collective Israel and Jehovah's Servant. His mission is not only to the Gentiles, but to his own people—to Israel and to Jacob. If the Servant were nothing else than a personified Israel, there would be something inexplicable in the language which declares him appointed “to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel.”

The third passage is ch. l. 4-10—

“The Lord hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary; he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face as a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moths shall eat them up. Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.”

Here again the individuality of the Servant is overpoweringly present. That such language should be deliberately put into the mouth of a

people is too glaringly improbable to be supposed. Were it not for the connection and context, we might imagine that the Prophet was speaking in his own person without any other thought, so clearly do his words describe the endowments, the feelings, the actions and sufferings, of some individual witness for God. The tongue of the learned, the opening of the ear, the smiting of the back, the plucking out of the hair, the spitting on the face—how can such phrases be without violence applied to the collective Israel?

Similar remarks may be made respecting the last of the four passages, the great Passion-prophecy itself, of which a corrected version has already been given. The irresistible impression which it leaves on the mind, when taken as a whole, is that of some individual servant of God through whose vicarious sufferings redemption should be achieved. In reading it through, it is scarcely possible to persuade oneself that it is nothing but a poetical description of a wasted and captive nation, however much that nation may have borne the character of a witness for God to the world. Parts of it, perhaps, especially the earlier verses, might, if they stood alone, be

made without much violence to bear that meaning; but surely not the whole. In those verses which speak of the death and burial of Jehovah's Servant, of the offering of his soul for sin, and of the intercession made by him for the transgressors, there are such distinct features of individuality as to transcend any ordinary limits of mere personification, and to force on the reader's mind the idea that the Prophet's thought has passed from the collective Israel, and been gathered up and concentrated in some great, individual minister of God's redemptive purpose.

Now all these four passages of the prophecy present features which need to be explained by a critical analysis that pretends to be complete, and which the rationalistic denial of any reference beyond the literal Israel leaves without explanation.

Moreover it is clear that these portions of the prophecy are not insignificant ones, which may be lightly passed over, or left in obscurity, without detracting materially from its general purport. Rather, they have the appearance of being of first-rate importance, as indicating the climax and final outcome of the Prophet's thought, and standing at what may be called the high-

water mark of his inspiration. They *must* be taken into account, and be made prominent in our enquiry, if we would discover all that his utterances really convey.

§ 6. *The Servant of Jehovah.*

To guide us now to a full reply to the question, Who or what is the Servant of Jehovah? we need to be furnished with a reasonable explanation of the apparent wavering, in the Prophet's use of the phrase, between a collective and a personal reference. The stronghold of the rationalist's position is the undeniable fact, that in the greater part of the "book of consolations" the Servant is certainly the nation of Israel, whether viewed historically or ideally. There can be no mistake about this. Early in the book, at the first introduction of the term, we read, "Thou Israel art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend;" and the designation is many times repeated, as if to keep the collective people in the reader's thought as the subject of the prophecy. Is it then possible, we are asked, that a writer of such an exquisite literary gift as this great Prophet should, in his use of the cardinal phrase of his addresses, have passed backwards and forwards from one sense to another, and that a very different one, without the slightest intimation or warning? In the midst of his

exhortations to the exiles around him, while describing them collectively as Jehovah's Servant, can he be supposed to have interjected, without explanation, passages still employing the same term, but now not referring to the exiles at all, but only to some individual agent of the divine purposes, who was to be raised up many hundreds of years afterwards, under an entirely different condition of the national existence? Would not such a supposition ascribe to this master of prophetic language an utterly incredible disregard of those ordinary rules of composition, by the observance alone of which a writer can convey his meaning intelligibly to his readers? No doubt such questions raise a very important issue; and till some satisfactory answer is found to them, the personal interpretation of the Servant in the great Passion-Chapter can scarcely be said to rest on a firm critical basis.

In mitigation of the difficulty, something might perhaps be pleaded on the ground of our ignorance whether the long "book of consolations" is now arranged in the original order, and is strictly continuous; or whether there may not have been pauses in it, or divisions into sections, the evidences of which have disappeared, but which at



the time may in some degree have guarded the readers against confusing together different meanings of the great term "Servant of Jehovah." But it will be more satisfactory if, simply taking the whole prophecy as it now stands, and has stood for above two thousand years, we are able to discern a reasonable method of surmounting the difficulty.

It ought to be borne in mind that the Prophet was not writing with didactic calmness, but in a white heat of emotion and desire, of faith and hope. Pierced to the heart by the miseries of his shattered and captive nation, and groaning over the sins through which they had failed to witness effectually for God to the Gentile world, he was yet sure that the covenant with them could not perish, nor their calling of God come to nought. This especially, as we have seen, was clear to his mind, that Israel was the Lord's Servant, even in the humiliation and agony of Babylon, and that God's redemptive scheme was not suffering interruption, but was actually being advanced by this temporary crushing of His elect people. But then the anxious question would press upon him, How could such an Israel as he knew and saw ever become competent to fulfil its Messianic vocation,

and be the channel of salvation to heathendom? Did not the sad past, with all its memories of rebellion and perverseness, rise up to bear witness against it, and convict it of utter unfitness for so glorious a function? At least it must be miraculously transformed, spiritualised, clothed with a righteousness hitherto unheard of, raised to an ideal perfection, before a light could shine forth from it to lighten the Gentiles, and a law go out from Zion to instruct the nations in the ways of Jehovah. Yes, an ideal Israel of the future! in that alone lay any real hope of the fulfilment of the great promise, and the establishment of the divine kingdom. But again the question must have perplexed the Prophet, as he endeavoured to pierce the future, and catch a glimpse of the counsels of the most High, How could such an ideal Israel be formed? In what shape should it come? Surely no collective body of Israelites could ever satisfy the necessary conditions, and become capable of giving effect to God's grand purpose of redemption! But what if the nation were to produce and culminate in one perfect Servant of Jehovah, through and in Whom its vocation might be accomplished? Other prophets had been enabled to look forward to a Davidic

king reigning in righteousness, and bringing peace and salvation to Israel; why should not the same hope now take form in an individual Servant, raised up by God out of the bosom of the nation, through whose travail the kingdom of God should at last be born into the world?

Thoughts of the nature here indicated could scarcely have been absent from the minds of the most spiritually enlightened of Israel's weary exiles; and it seems but reasonable to suppose that in the heart of such an one as the great Prophet of the Captivity they must have surged to and fro with more than common vehemence. And if so, they would at once explain the sort of wavering which we have observed in his utterances between the collective and the personal senses of the "Servant of Jehovah," and also form a sufficient ground on which the Spirit of prophecy, overruling and guiding his words, could rest a glorious prediction of God's method of redemption. It would not be necessary to suppose that the Prophet was consciously, and with definite knowledge, foretelling the coming and work of the ideal Israelite; or that with deliberate intention he passed backwards and forwards, in the same continuous prophecy, from the collective to

the individual, and from the individual to the collective, conception of the Servant. It would be sufficient to explain the phenomena of his utterances, if, at the flood-times of his thought, his longing for the ideal became so intense, and his sense of the incompetence of Israel to realise it grew so keen, that he was, under the impulses of the Spirit, borne on at such moments to use language which no longer corresponded to the corporate nation, but rose into a prophetic presentiment of a personal Deliverer. He would thus furnish an additional illustration of the experience so frequent among the elder saints, in whom faith outran their knowledge; and it might be said of him, as Keble says of Joseph in "the pit beside the desert way,"—

"And knew not how, but knew his God would save."

In support of this explanation an appeal may be made to two of the foremost Hebrew scholars of our time, one English, the other German.

Mr. Cheyne, it is well known, holds firmly, on critical grounds, to the orthodox interpretation of those portions of the "book of consolations," which have been singled out as especially descriptive of a personal "Servant of Jehovah." Here,

he says, "the Servant is distinctly individualized;" and again, "In the sublimest descriptions of the Servant I am unable to resist the impression that a historical person is intended." Yet when he puts the question, "Who is the Servant of Jehovah?" he replies, "Certainly not, in the proper sense of the word, the Messiah; certainly not, in all the extant descriptions, an individual. Both these explanations must from the very first be excluded, as absolutely opposed to a philological exegesis." And again, "The Servant of Jehovah, even in the most individualizing passages, is not, properly speaking, the Messiah." How he reconciles these apparently antagonistic positions may be gathered from the following statements, extracted from the second edition of his work on "The Prophecies of Isaiah." The personal, he says, is superinduced on the collective. Here is the point of contact between the personal and the national Servant of Jehovah, that the person is, strange as it seems, the mature product, the flower and fruit, of the Jewish nation. The prophet, in his intense longing for the fulfilment of Israel's ideal, feels his way, not at random, to the presence of the Redeemer. He passes gradually from a lower to a higher conception of his great

argument. Beginning with the conception of the people of Israel—sometimes the natural, sometimes the spiritual Israel—he at length transcends the actual, and throws out in colossal outlines an indistinct, because imaginatively expressed, conception of One Who should perfectly fulfil a Redeemer's functions, for and with His people. He utters a presentiment rather than a definite prediction. He leaves the solution of the problem to God, and trusts Him, Who cannot abandon His people, to produce the ideal and perfect Israelite in his own time.

Our other witness is Professor Delitzsch, so well known in this country as an able expositor of Isaiah, and a champion of orthodox Christianity against the attacks of the rationalistic school. His interpretation of the Servant of Jehovah, is found, in its latest form, in the work already referred to, "The Old Testament History of Redemption," and is as follows:—"The conception of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah xl-lxvi, with respect to its lowest broad basis, is entire Israel: with respect to its centre, it is the congregation remaining true to God, which in the dispersion is the scattered seed of the future congregation, growing together from Israel and the

heathen. From this centre the conception becomes personal. Its pyramidal apex is the future Christ, in Whom the sufferings of the congregation of Jehovah are reproduced and culminate, and by Whom Israel's redemptive calling is completed." It will be noticed that the connection between the lower and the higher meanings of the Servant is thus found in the view of Israel, which has been already dwelt upon; namely, that the elect nation had a redemptive calling, which went forward to its completion in the personal Messiah; and that its sufferings in Babylon were, so to speak, the primary sketch or prelude outline of His sufferings, the typical fore-shadowing of His Cross and Passion.

To these witnesses may be added Dr. Ederheim, whose substantial concurrence in the same view may be gathered from the subjoined extract from his elaborate and learned volumes on "Jesus the Messiah": "The idea of Israel, as the Servant of the Lord, is concentrated in the Messiah as the Representative Israelite; so that the Book of Isaiah, as the series of predictions in which His picture is most fully outlined, might be summarized as that concerning the Servant of Jehovah."

§ 7. *The order of the Prophet's thought.*

We are now prepared to collect into a single focus the several lines of our discussion, and to trace the order of the great Prophet's thought.

Dwelling, at least in spirit if not in actual bodily presence, amidst the spoiled and captive remnant of his once-favoured people, he addressed to them the words of comfort and hope. Knowing their election of God to be a Messianic race, an anointed nation, charged with a mission to manifest His salvation and righteousness to the world; he was sure that they could not be prematurely crushed out of existence by the violence of the heathen, but must be preserved, and in due time lifted up again, to accomplish their high calling. Hence the basis of his thought, if we may revert to Delitzsch's figure of a pyramid, was the historical Israel, the nation called in Abraham, brought out of Egypt by Moses, ruled over by David, but now lying prostrate under the heel of the Chaldæan oppressor.

But in proportion as the conception of Israel as the Messianic nation acquired strength and



precision in his mind, and assumed the form of the "Servant of Jehovah" raised up to achieve His redeeming purpose, the Prophet felt himself compelled to abstract the idea of Israel from all the disturbing and confusing adjuncts of its actual story, from all its rebellions, idolatries, and failures, and to picture the nation to himself ideally in the form answering to the divine purpose, as the elect and holy Seed, bearing in its bosom the hope of the world's salvation. Hence, in the second stage of his thought, the Servant of Jehovah is no longer the actual but the ideal Israel, of which the pious part of the remnant which he addressed was the existing representative.

Yet not even here could his mind find complete satisfaction and repose. Straining his eyes, as it were, to catch glimpses of the ideal Israel in its glorious mission, and finding himself unable to imagine it competent in any collective form to achieve so great a destiny as that to which God had called it, the Prophet seems to have been led on, under the stress of his spiritual longings, and by the guidance of the Divine Inspirer who spoke through him, not only to idealise, but to individualise Israel; to draw its portrait in the features of a Person—to gather it up in a Servant of Jehovah,

Who should indeed be the true Israel of God, the true Seed of Abraham in the highest sense, the very embodiment and representative of the elect people; and yet not the collective nation, but its final outcome, its perfect flower, its personal Head<sup>1</sup>. Thus in the third and last stage the Prophet's thought, which had already been narrowed from the literal to the ideal Israel, was narrowed still more as it climbed the heights of prophecy, till it reached its apex in the personal Christ, the Redeemer of the world.

It may be added, that the key to this gradual transition, and this narrowing of the conception of Jehovah's Servant, is to be found in the union of these two ideas: first, that Israel is the prophetic nation, the type of the Messiah, even the typical Christ, if the expression may be allowed; and, secondly, that Christ, as its final outcome and impersonation, is the anti-typical Israel<sup>2</sup>. Keeping

<sup>1</sup> "Christ claiming to be the true Vine claims perfectly to realize in Himself that divine idea which Israel after the flesh had altogether failed to fulfil. . . . What Israel should have been and was not, this Christ, *the true Israel*, was."—*Trench, Studies in the Gospels* pp. 275, 276.

<sup>2</sup> *St. Augustine, De Civ. Dei*, xvii. 17: "Jesus Himself was the substance of that people from which His human nature was derived."

these ideas in mind, we shall find no difficulty in understanding how language, which primarily, in its lowest and immediate historical sense, was suggested by the sufferings of Israel endured in the fulfilment of its Messianic calling, does really, in its higher and more spiritual sense, pourtray the Passion of Him Whom Israel was created to typify and to produce, even the personal Christ of God. And in this transition from the lower to the higher sense, we may discern a new example of the order enunciated by St. Paul: "that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual <sup>1</sup>." The historical Israel first, the son loved by God and called by Him out of Egypt; the Christ afterwards, born of Israel after the flesh, but also the Son out of the Father's bosom, in Whom He is well pleased.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 46.

§ 8. *Evidential bearing of the discussion.*

In conclusion, a few words may be added to point out how this argument serves to contribute something to the proofs of the supernatural origin of Christianity.

Approaching the famous prophecy from the historical point of view, we have discovered, in the circumstances actually present to the writer of it, whether naturally, or by prophetic anticipation, a sufficient origin for its ideas, and an adequate basis for its portraiture. But we have also seen that parts of it mysteriously transcend those circumstances, and irresistibly suggest to us that the Prophet, in the intensity of his thoughts and emotions, was borne on to a loftier theme, not indeed alien from that with which he began, but bearing to it the relation of the ideal to the actual. These parts of the prophetic strain set before us an exquisitely drawn picture of an individual Servant of Jehovah, raised up and equipped by Him to accomplish and complete the very work which Israel had been set

apart to inaugurate, and who, by righteous obedience freely rendered, and voluntary suffering unto death meekly endured, makes atonement for sin which is not his own, and reconciles transgressors to God.

Turning now to the Gospels, we find this striking and pathetic portrait so exactly realised in the character, the ministry, and the Passion of Jesus of Nazareth, the descendant of David after the flesh, that it might have been taken from the life by those who companied with Him, instead of having been drawn ideally many hundreds of years before. And, finally, we learn that this remarkable prefiguration is no solitary one, but only the most striking and complete of a long series, furnished by the annals and literature of the Hebrew race; a series of prefigurations which is only explicable on the supposition that the Hebrew race was a prophetic or typical one, ordained by God to foreshadow the Redeemer, to Whom in the fulness of time it should give birth. Thus, as we observe and ponder, a divine scheme and order grows into majestic coherence before our minds, and we are impressed with the conviction that, in the whole sequence of events from Abraham downwards, in the line of the chosen race,

God was working out His redeeming purpose, and preparing the way for the manifestation of His Son to the world.

If a practical test of the force of this witness to Christianity be demanded, it may be found in Bishop Burnet's "Life of the Earl of Rochester." "None of all our libertines," says the prelate of that nobleman, "understood better than he the secret mysteries of sin, had more studied everything that could support a man in it, and had more resisted all external means of conviction than he had done." Yet as he lay on the death-bed to which vicious excesses had prematurely brought him, it pleased God to make the 53rd chapter of Isaiah the means of converting him to repentance and faith. "He said to me," relates the Bishop, who used to visit him, "that as he heard it read, he felt an inward force upon him, which did so enlighten his mind and convince him that he could resist it no longer. For the words had an authority which did shoot like rays or beams in his mind; so that he was convinced, not only by the reasonings he had about it which satisfied his understanding, but by a power which did so effectually constrain him, that he did ever after as firmly believe

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